

Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 SSC-01 OMB-01 EB-08 TRSE-00 CIAE-00
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FM AMEMBASSY BRUSSELS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 9584
INFO AMEMBASSY ANKARA
AMEMBASSY ATHENS
AMEMBASSY BONN
AMEMBASSY COPENHAGEN
AMEMBASSY DUBLIN
AMEMBASSY LISBON
AMEMBASSY LONDON
AMEMBASSY LUXEMBOURG
AMEMBASSY OSLO
AMEMBASSY OTTAWA
AMEMBASSY PARIS
AMEMBASSY REYKJAVIK
AMEMBASSY ROME
AMEMBASSY THE HAGUE
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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, BE
SUBJECT: BELGIUM ELECTS A NEW PARLIAMENT SUNDAY

BEGIN UNCLASSIFIED

SUMMARY: SOME 6.5 MILLION BELGIAN VOTERS WILL ELECT A NEW PARLIAMENT
SUNDAY IN NATIONAL ELECTIONS CALLED 40 DAYS AGO BY PRIME MINISTER
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LEO TINDEMANS TO BREAK A POLITICAL IMPASSE WHICH STRAIT-JACKETED HIS
THREE-YEAR-OLD GOVERNMENT. THE ELECTORAL CAMPAIGN HAS BEEN LACKLUSTER
AND WITHOUT FOCUS ON SPECIFIC ISSUES. PROFESSIONAL OBSERVERS EXPECT
THE BALLOTING TO REGISTER ONLY MINOR CHANGES IN THE RELATIVE STRENGTH
S
OF THE DOZEN PARTIES CONTESTING THE ELECTIONS. PRIME MINISTER
TINDEMANS IS EXPECTED TO REGISTER A CONSIDERABLE PERSONAL SUCCESS,

AND HE IS LIKELY TO BE THE KING'S FIRST CHOICE TO TRY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT COALITION. TINDEMANS' PREFERENCE IS TO MAKE COMMON CAUSE WITH HIS CHRISTIAN PARTY'S CHIEF RIVAL, THE BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY, IN A COALITION THAT WOULD REPRESENT NEARLY TWO-THIRDS OF THE ELECTORATE. END SUMMARY.

1. BELGIAN VOTERS WILL ELECT 212 DEPUTIES TO THE LOWER HOUSE OF PARLIAMENT IN A SIMPLE PROPORTIONAL REPRESENTATION SELECTION SYSTEM. IN EACH ARRONDISSEMENT COMPETING PARTIES OFFER CANDIDATES LISTED IN ORDER OF THE PARTY'S PREFERENCE. VOTERS MAY CAST THE BALLOT FOR THE WHOLE PARTY LIST OR CAST A PREFERENCE VOTE FOR INDIVIDUAL CANDIDATES. IN LIKE FASHION 106 MEMBERS OF THE 182-MEMBER UPPER HOUSE, OR SENATE, WILL BE ELECTED, THE REMAINDER BEING SELECTED INDIRECTLY AT A LATER DATE.

2. IN THE KEY LOWER HOUSE (ON WHOSE CONFIDENCE THE GOVERNMENT DEPENDS), THE PARTY LINEUP IN THE DISSOLVED CHAMBER WAS AS FOLLOWS:

CHRISTIAN PARTY - 72 SEATS (50 HELD BY THE CHRISTIAN PEOPLES PARTY (FLEMISH) AND 22 BY THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (FRANCOPHONE).

BELGIAN SOCIALIST PARTY - 59 SEATS (OF WHICH 33 FRANCOPHONES AND 26 FLEMISH).

LIBERAL PARTY - 36 SEATS (OF WHICH 21 REPRESENTED A SEPARATE FLEMISH LIBERAL PARTY, 12 THE WALLOON LIBERAL PARTY AND 3 THE BRUSSELS LIBERAL PARTY.

VOLKSUNIE (FLEMISH LINGUISTIC PARTY) - 22 SEATS.

RASSEMBLEMENT WALLON (WALLOON LINGUISTIC PARTY)- 10 SEATS.

FRONT DEMOCRATIQUE FRANCOPHONE (BRUSSELS LINGUISTIC PARTY) - 9 SEATS.

BELGIAN COMMUNIST PARTY - 4 SEATS.

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3. A FIVE-WEEK ELECTION CAMPAIGN HAS PRODUCED NO DOMINANT CAMPAIGN ISSUES AND VERY LITTLE INTEREST AMONG VOTERS REQUIRED BY LAW TO GO TO THE POLLS. LEFTWING SOCIALIST TACTICIANS IN WALLONIA SOUGHT WITH LITTLE APPARENT SUCCESS TO LURE LEFT-LEANING CHRISTIAN PARTY VOTERS INTO A "PROGRESSIVE FRONT" COMMITTED TO RADICAL ATTACK ON BELGIUM'S ECONOMIC AND SOCIAL ILLS. FRANCOPHONE PARTIES ASSERTED - WITH LIMITED CONVICTION - THAT THE ISSUE WAS THE "CVP STATE," I.E. DOMINATION OF BELGIUM BY TINDEMANS' PARTY, WHICH IS FLEMISH AND IDEOLOGICALLY OF A CENTER-RIGHT CAST. THE ISSUE OF HOW BELGIUM IS TO BE RE-STRUCTURED INTO A DECENTRALIZED FEDERAL STATE - THE PROXIMATE CAUSE OF THE SURRENDER OF THE TINDEMANS GOVERNMENT IN MARCH - WAS ONLY CURSORILY DISCUSSED IN THE CAMPAIGN. (NO ONE HAD ANYTHING NEW TO SAY ON THE SUBJECT.)

4. PROFESSIONAL OBSERVERS EXPECT THAT THE NEW PARLIAMENT WILL LOOK VERY MUCH LIKE THE ONE IT WILL REPLACE. ACCORDING TO A WIDELY-ACCEPTED

CONSENSUS: (1) TINDEMANS' FLEMISH CHRISTIANS (AND HE PERSONALLY) WILL

IMPROVE SOMEWHAT ON THEIR SUCCESSFUL 1974 SHOWING; (2) THE SISTER
SOCIAL CHRISTIAN PARTY (FRANCOPHONE) IS LIKELY TO SUFFER LOSSES IN
WALLONIA; (3) THE CONSERVATIVE LIBERAL PARTIES ARE LIKELY TO ROUGHLY
MATCH THEIR 1974 SHOWING; (4) THE SOCIALIST PARTY IS LIKELY TO IMPROV
E
ON 1974 IN WALLONIA AND SUFFER A SETBACK IN FLANDERS; (5) THE
LINGUISTIC PARTIES IN BRUSSELS AND FLANDERS WILL HOLD THEIR OWN OR
SLIP A BIT WHILE THE WALLOON RALLY IS LIKELY TO LOSE SOME GROUND.
END UNCLASSIFIED

5. COMMENT: IF THE VOTERS PERFORM AS THEIR PULSE-TAKERS EXPECT,
TINDEMANS WILL ALMOST CERTAINLY BE THE FIRST POLITICAL LEADER ASKED
TO TRY TO FORM A NEW GOVERNMENT. HE WOULD FIRST TRY TO FORM A
COALITION OF THE CHRISTIAN AND SOCIALIST PARTIES WITH A MAJORITY
BIG ENOUGH TO SUPPORT VIGOROUS ATTACKS ON THE COUNTRY'S ECONOMIC,
SOCIAL AND LINGUISTIC PROBLEMS. BUT STANDING IN THE WAY OF SUCH
A GOVERNMENT ARE SERIOUS POLICY DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO BIG
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PARTIES AND BAD BLOOD BETWEEN SOME OF THEIR KEY LEADERS.SMOKE
W LL PROBABLY FILL MANY ROOMS BEFORE THE NEXT PRIME MINISTER PRESENTS
HIS CABINET TO THE KING. RENNR

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